

"CHRIST BEFORE PILATE"

from

Plain Sermons *On Subjects* *Practical and Prophetic*

by Alexander McCaul

*"Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?
Thine own nation, and the chief priests, have delivered thee unto me."
John 18:35*

THE glory promised to Israel in the kingdom of Christ, naturally directs our attention to them as the hope of the world, and the peculiar favourites of heaven. "All Israel is to be saved: the people all righteous; and all that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the seed whom the Lord hath blessed." They are to be the centre of temporal dominion, and the fountain of spiritual blessing. When we combine this future glory with their past history, and remember that salvation has been already of the Jews; that the word of God, the gifts of prophecy, and the dwelling-place of God upon earth, were confined to that people; that if we look for examples of holiness, wonders of faith, and instances of devotedness and love to God, we must select Jews; we are almost inclined to think that this people must be formed of different materials from the other nations of the world; that there must be some exception respecting either the natural wickedness of the human heart, or the extent of the fall of man. But a more general view of their history and conduct speedily removes this error, and shews us that the Jewish saints, who are at once the ornament and the example of the human race, attained to their pre-eminence, not by their own innate strength, but by the distinguishing grace of God: for this same nation is also pre-eminent in examples of wickedness and rebellion against God. If Abraham, David, the Prophets and Apostles, were Israelites, so also were Jeroboam, Ahab, Manasseh, Judas the traitor, and the High-priests, the crucifiers of our Lord.

We therefore conclude, that except where God makes men to differ, there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile. In external things there may be a great difference, but in natural wickedness there is none. The history connected with my text proves the identity of nature. Pilate and the High-priests are both guilty of the murder of the Holy One and Just. "Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation, and the chief priests, have delivered thee unto me." These words present for our consideration the conduct of three distinct characters:

- I. THE CHIEF PRIESTS;
- II. PILATE;
- III. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The consideration of any one of these would afford sufficient matter for a sermon: but the most instructive consideration lies in the contrast presented. We propose, therefore, to consider the conduct of each in the order mentioned.

I. The conduct of the CHIEF PRIESTS. "Thine own nation, and the chief priests, have delivered thee unto me." The plain account of the conduct of the Jews is this: they, or rather their chief priests and the Pharisees—those considered to be the most religious among them, and who from their office and

pretensions ought to have been so,—saw reason to be dissatisfied with the doctrines and the claims of Jesus. They pretended to consider them as hostile to their law, and dangerous to their national existence. They were therefore determined to get rid of him, by any means, and at all events, if it could be done without danger to themselves, or damage to their interests. They therefore applied to the civil magistrate; they delivered Jesus to the Roman governor. Perhaps there is not in the whole word of God a more striking example of the deceitfulness and blindness of the human heart. They pretend to be actuated by love to the law, and yet in their conduct they root up its very foundation. They profess zeal for the honour of God, and yet exhibit total unbelief. They profess to take away a public grievance, and yet they only serve their petty self-interest.

The High-priests and Rulers were Jews, and therefore subjects of a theocracy. The law given them by God had indissolubly united Church and State; and they justly maintained that their authority was derived from God; that He was the only source of all power. Their law expressly forbade them to take a heathen for their king, and their traditions pronounced a curse upon any one who should deliver a Jew to a heathen magistrate. But here they regard neither law nor tradition, but deliver Jesus to the judgment of Pilate. The offence for which they themselves condemned Jesus was blasphemy. When Jesus confessed himself the Christ, the Son of God, “the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? Behold now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.” (Matt. xxvi. 65.) For this offence the law had assigned the penalty of death. “He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him; as well the stranger as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.” (Levit. xxiv. 16.) If they believed him guilty, it was their duty to have stoned him at once, and not left the vindication of God’s honour to the dubious decision of a heathen magistrate. There can be no doubt, that they heartily despised Pilate, as a heathen and an idolater; and therefore as one altogether ignorant of the truth. They must have looked upon him, not only as not a member of God’s church or people, but an enemy and an oppressor—as one of the prophane world, with whom they would not eat, nor drink, nor hold social intercourse. And yet when a question arises about God’s honour, and the welfare of his church and people, this is the man whom they call upon to legislate, whom they voluntarily constitute arbiter over God’s heritage, and safeguard of the church’s prosperity. Instead of exercising the power which they claimed for themselves, and which God had really given them, they call upon a heathen to exercise a power which God had not given him, and whose right they would in theory have denied. They fairly renounce the authority of God’s law, and give up the principle upon which the kingdom of God is founded. They acknowledge, in fact, that the sentence of the law of God is not sufficient, and require the sanction of the civil magistrate’s decision.

It may be said, that the sceptre had departed from Judah, and that therefore they had no authority to execute the sentence of the law. But this leads me to remark, that their conduct was as faithless as it was inconsistent. They professed to believe in God, but they were afraid to trust him, if they obeyed his law. In the most solemn of their assemblies, they decide that their law required Jesus to be put to death: “He is guilty of death,” was their unanimous sentence. But the heathen magistrate had put a veto on the law of God, and was ready to maintain that veto by force of arms. The sentence of the civil magistrate came into collision with the declaration of God’s law. The question was, who was to be obeyed, God or man? Faith would have said, “Come what will, God’s law must be obeyed; the blasphemer must be stoned; the congregation shall stone him, and we the chief priests will give them the example. We will shew them, that in our eyes God’s law is more precious than life; and that we will maintain its integrity, whatever be the consequence. God is our lawgiver; and whether the legislators of this world permit or forbid, we will obey him: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and will deliver us; but if not, we resign ourselves to his will.” Such was the language of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Such the conduct of Gideon, when he cut down Baal’s grove; and of Elijah, when he visited Ahab, and denounced his idolatry. But a living faith in a living God was not the

characteristic of the Jews, after the reformation by Ezra. A minute study of the law, and a scrupulous regard for ceremonial observances, constituted the religion of the mass after their return from Babylon. But living faith was extinct. The rejection of Christ was a necessary consequence. They were ready enough to rebel against Roman power, and to shed their blood as patriots: but they were not willing to suffer for the cause of God, nor to die a martyr's death. The natural man, if he have physical courage, is ready enough to gird on all the weapons of a carnal warfare, and to fight for his rights, whether they be civil or religious. For this no faith is requisite. He merely obeys the natural dictates of his corrupt heart: but passive resistance is beyond his power. It is faith, and faith only, that can enable a man to obey God quietly and firmly, and then take the consequences. This faith the Pharisees did not possess; they therefore applied to the civil magistrate, and confided to him, though a heathen, the care of God's honour, and the removal of evil from the church.

But, the truth is, they were not sincere; their conduct was a tissue of self-deceit and hypocrisy; they were not seeking either the glory of God, or the good of his people. Their own petty interests were in danger. Christ's doctrine interfered with their influence and power. This was the true blasphemy for which they condemned him. The mighty fabric of Pharisaism, self-righteousness, and traditions, tottered before the word of Christ. If it fell, it would envelope their power and glory in its ruins. It was therefore necessary to destroy Christ, and to destroy him in such a way as could not endanger themselves. Had they acted upon their professed principles, and stoned Christ, Pilate would have called them to account, and they would probably have forfeited their lives for their zeal; and for a martyr's death they had no inclination. An earthly not a heavenly crown was their object. They therefore applied to Pilate. A sentence from him could effect all that they desired—rid them of their supposed enemy, and leave the field clear for themselves. But here their hypocrisy plainly shews itself; their object was to have Jesus put to death, not to punish blasphemy. When therefore they come to Pilate they are silent about the blasphemy. They reasonably enough thought that Pilate would tell them, that was no business of his. They therefore bring forward a charge, which they think Pilate must notice and punish. They accuse him of treason against the emperor. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King." (Luke xxiii. 2) When Pilate said, I find no fault in him; it is written, "that they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." In all this there is not one word about that offence for which they had just condemned him. Nay, they accuse him of that which in their eyes was no offence at all, but the object of their fondest hopes and most ardent desire. Their waking dream at the very time was the advent of King Messiah to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and to forbid them to pay tribute to Caesar. There is not any part of their conduct which more clearly shews the hollowness of their religious profession, than the charge preferred against the Lord Jesus. They thought that the most obnoxious thing in the eyes of the Roman governor was the religious hope of the nation; that, therefore, they choose as the ground of accusation. They condemned him for that of which they could not accuse him. And they accuse him of that for which they never could or would have condemned him—a plain proof that they were not in earnest in either the one or the other, but had an end of their own to serve in both.

II. Self was the great idol before which the Jewish high-priests sacrificed their religious hope and their principles. But it is not Jews or priests alone who bow before this divinity—self-seeking is the root of all sin. When men sin against God or man, it is only because they love themselves better than either. Every sin, wherever or by whomsoever committed, can be traced to this one source. We have now had occasion to shew how this self-love prevailed in the hearts of those professing to be in a peculiar manner the most religious of God's people. But the history before us, leads us to observe it, secondly, in the man of the world. Pilate was not a priest, but a statesman—not a gloomy bigot, but a liberal heathen—not a narrow-minded fanatic, but a polite and accomplished Roman. In all external circumstances he was the very opposite of the Jewish high-priests: but in his heart he was one of the same species—a lover of self—a man prepared to sacrifice duty, justice, liberality, and all sense of right and

wrong to his self-interest.

As governor of Judea, his duty was to administer justice equally and impartially to all the emperor's subjects—to maintain the honour of the Roman laws—to punish the guilty and protect the innocent. It was his duty as much as possible to prevent the slightest injustice; but the case of our Lord particularly called for energy and firmness. He stood as a poor and humble preacher of righteousness before Pilate, innocent in life, unblameable in conduct, and yet the intended victim of priestly hatred, and religious jealousy. The object of his enemies was not simply to silence his preaching, or to deprive him of temporal possessions. A rival priesthood and an infuriated populace thirsted for his blood. Murder, murder was the cry. Pilate's simple duty was to inquire, whether he were guilty of death, or deserving of protection; and that, not according to his own judgment, but according to the principles of that law of which he was the administrator. If found unworthy of protection, then to give him over to the punishment prescribed by the law. But, if innocent, to extend to him, humble as he appeared to be, all that protection which the law afforded. The literature and philosophy of Pilate's day conspired with his plain duty to move him to protect Christ. As an educated Roman, living in all the vaunted light of the Augustan era, his professed principles must have been liberality towards all religious opinions, and horror of all religious fanaticism. I doubt not, that he looked with contempt upon what he considered the persecution and bigotry inculcated in the Mosaic law, and considered the punishment of death therein denounced against idolatry as nothing short of murder. His professed principles would therefore have taught him, not to suffer a teacher of religion, whatever that religion might be, to be cruelly and barbarously murdered by those whose religious tenets were different. Pilate's personal estimate of our Lord's character was another reason why he should have afforded him all the protection which his situation as governor of Judea made possible. He did not look upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a religious impostor who traded upon the credulity of the ignorant, nor as a hypocrite who made religious profession the cloak for the gratification of sordid bodily appetites. He evidently looked upon him as an honest and respectable character. He acquits him of all the charges: "Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people, and, behold, I having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him: and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him." (Luke xxiii. 14, 15.) He perfectly saw through the hypocrisy and malice of the priests. We are expressly told (Matt. xxvii. 18), "He knew that for envy they had delivered him." And yet, notwithstanding his duty, his principles, his conviction, and his sense of right and wrong, he quietly allows an innocent man to be murdered. He declares publicly, that it ought not to be done; and he has the power to prevent it, and yet permits the perpetration of a foul and cruel murder.

What was the all-powerful cause that could thus triumph over justice and conviction? What was the mighty motive that could hush the voice of conscience, and extinguish the last spark of humanity? What the irresistible torrent that could convert the liberal statesman into the bloody instrument of religious persecution, and make the minister of justice an accomplice in the murder of the innocent? Was it the sudden ebullition of uncontrollable passion? No: in all the conduct of Pilate there is the utmost coolness and calculation. Was it the insidious voice of an adulterous Herodias, whose web of snares was too firmly spun to be broken? No: Pilate's wife warned him against the deed. Was it the fear of instant and cruel torture, that for a moment overpowered the dictates of reason? No: Pilate's person was in perfect security. The invincible legions of the mistress of the world were his safeguard.

The only possible palliation of Pilate's conduct is, that he was a heathen, and did not profess the religious principles of him whose life he sacrificed: other palliation there is none. It was neither passion, nor love, nor fear, by which he was actuated, but base and sordid selfishness. He was afraid of losing his place. He was governor of Judea. The situation was both honourable and lucrative. If he resisted the clamours of the Jews concerning Jesus, he was afraid they might find their way to the Roman emperor, and be the means of displacing him. His polite and liberal education did not teach

him that there is a God that judgeth in the earth. Worldly prudence was his highest wisdom; and this prudence taught him that it was more expedient to suffer an obscure, though innocent, individual to be murdered, than to incur the hatred and ill-will of a powerful and factious hierarchy. Instead of asserting the dignity and authority of a governor, he tried to reason with them in a tone of irresolution and timidity, which only increased their confidence. They began with entreaty, but they ended with a threat; and that threat carried the day. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself king speaketh against Cæsar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth." The question was now between self-interest and wilful murder. Self-interest prevailed. But Pilate's prudence deceived him. The clamours to which he now yielded, ultimately prevailed to remove him from that situation for which he sacrificed innocent blood. He died a suicide, and his name has been preserved only to stamp it with infamy. His wanton abuse of the power entrusted to him by God has been already punished; and the day is coming, when he must stand before the judgment-seat of Him whom he so recklessly delivered to be crucified.

III. The coming of that day is the true consolation of the Christian. In this world he cannot expect to be treated better than his Master. Persecution and death are his predicted portion. It is therefore important to know what should be our conduct in similar circumstances of trial; and here our blessed Saviour hath left us an example that we should tread in his steps. Let us then consider, in the third place, the conduct of Christ. It presents a striking contrast to that of the Jewish priests, and of Pilate. They both gave up their professed principles for their worldly interest, and compromised the dignity of their office;—the high priests, by appearing as suppliants at the bar of a heathen judge; and Pilate, by reasoning with those whom he was appointed to govern. Christ appears with uncompromising firmness, not forgetful of the respect due to Pilate's office, and yet maintaining the dignity of His own character. Pilate was, in the course of providence, our Lord's lawful judge, and the governor of His country. He was a bad man, and an unjust judge, and our Lord knew it; but not a word of reproach nor reproof fell from His most holy lips. Ignorant zeal would have thought it a providential call to tell Pilate the truth: but our Lord knew that he was called before his bar, not to preach a sermon, but to receive a sentence; he therefore spoke only when he was spoken to.

The last scene of His life did not contradict all that His previous life had taught. He had been for three years and a half a Prophet and a Preacher. He had fearlessly exposed the abuses and perversions of God's law. He had reproved the hypocrisy and the sins of his times. He had denounced a woe against the Scribes and Lawyers, the Pharisees and the Sadducees; but he had never uttered one disrespectful word against those who held the reins of government either in Church or State. In all Christ's preaching, there is not to be found one reproachful word, either against the High Priests or against Pilate. Once in the Gospels a fair opportunity is related, when Christ might have expressed his opinion of Pilate's atrocity. "There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." (Luke xiii. 1.) A blind zealot would have called down the wrath of heaven upon such sacrilegious murder: but our Lord understood too well the spirit of that law which he himself had given, "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people." (Exod. xxii. 28.) He therefore passes by Pilate's conduct in silence, and addresses the consciences of those who told him. "Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Instead of condemning either Pilate or the Galileans, he tells these rejoicers in evil to look to themselves. He did not consider himself, at that time, the Judge of the rulers of his country, but the obedient and loyal subject. Neither did he regard it as part of the Gospel, to hold up to public contempt and derision the sins and transgressions of those whom the law commanded him, as man, to respect and obey. With regard to their evil deeds, our Lord preserved an inviolable silence during the whole course of his ministry; and when at last he was providentially called to the presence of Pilate, he

pursued the same line of conduct. He volunteered no preaching of the Gospel, nor any denunciation of wrath, but simply answered Pilate's questions. He did not however shrink from confessing the truth, nor conceal the extent of His claims. When Pilate asked him, "What hast thou done?" He does not allude to his preaching, nor recount the numberless miracles of grace which He had wrought, but comes directly to the accusation which the Jews had brought against Him. He selects that portion of his doctrine, which was represented to Pilate as treasonable. He answers, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." He at once confesses that He is a King, and such a King as at once placed him above Pilate. He gave him a pertinent and respectful answer, and at the same time shewed him the awful dignity of his character as a King from heaven. He is determined that the judge shall not condemn Him ignorantly. He lets him know that it is no mere man whom he has at his tribunal, but a King from heaven.

Either Pilate did not understand Him, or wished to get rid of this solemn idea. He therefore asks again, "Art Thou a King then?" But our Lord takes care that he shall fully understand what He is about. He therefore replies, "Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into this world, that I should bear witness unto the truth;" adding a solemn warning at the end: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." When Pilate subsequently said, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Christ again warned him by referring to himself as the source of all power. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore He [sic, he?] that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin:" *i. e.* I am the supreme Ruler come down upon earth, and yet the Jews, instead of receiving me, have delivered me unto thee; therefore their sin is the greater. It is true that here, as when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world," there is an ambiguity. But this very ambiguity should have led Pilate to inquire further, and to have conjectured, if this aggravated the sin of those who delivered Him, what would be the sin of him who judicially condemned Him? Each succeeding answer of our Lord is a more explicit assertion of his own dignity, and a more plain intimation of his exaltation above all human tribunals.

Another striking feature in our Lord's conduct, is His simple committal of his cause to Him that judgeth righteously. He did not make any appeal to either the justice or humanity of Pilate; neither did He retort any accusation upon those who sought his life. He simply witnessed a good confession, and then left all in the hands of His heavenly Father. If there be one feature in the character of our Lord more difficult of imitation than another, it is this. It is a common saying, that self-defence is the first law of nature,—that may be so, but it forms no part of the law of Christ. The natural man naturally tries to defend himself, and has no scruple as to the weapons to be employed. Even the Christian who refuses to avenge himself by the sword, often thinks it his bounden duty to defend his rights by the force of argument, or by an attack on the character of his adversaries.

But our blessed Lord and Saviour did not defend himself at all, nor employ any means for the preservation of His life. The reason was, because he had, what the Jews had not, perfect reliance in the love, wisdom, and power of His heavenly Father. Because the Jews had it not, they apply for assistance to the heathen governor. And Christ, because He had it, used neither entreaty nor defence. He did not look for justice nor help from man. As born under the law He was a member of the Jewish church, and as Messiah He had a kingdom not of this world. In neither case could He apply to a heathen magistrate for justice against the High-priests, nor for the promotion of His own kingdom. The question between Him and the High-priests was a question of the Jewish church, and by that church, not by the Roman magistrate, it ought to have been settled. The Chief-priests were wicked men, but still they were Chief-priests, and their wickedness did not in the least affect their claim to the authority which the Mosaic law had given them. Our Lord therefore, though suffering unjustly, does not in the slightest degree impugn their authority. He does not make their wickedness a ground of His defence, nor of the

insufficiency of their testimony. He does not expose their sins, nor the abuses of the whole system, to Pilate, in order that He may save His own life. He acknowledges them as the spiritual rulers, and maintains a profound silence with regard to their characters, even when Pilate declared, "Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me." He had already committed the matter into the hands of His Father in an agony of prayer: "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will but thy will be done." He was ready to abide the issue. It was safer there than in the hands of Pilate. As Messiah, Pilate could have no authority over Him; but He was Lord over Pilate. This He plainly intimates, when He says, "My kingdom is not of this world." Pilate's authority was only of this world. He had therefore no right to interfere with Christ, but was bound to obey Him, as our Lord also intimates, when He says, "He that is of the truth heareth my voice." In neither case could our Lord appeal to the justice of Pilate, without directly giving up His faith in His heavenly Father. He therefore silently submits. He denies Pilate's right, but He submits to His authority. "He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him." "He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." Such are the striking features in the conduct of the Jews, of Pilate, and our Lord. They afford ample scope for practical application. But there are three points to which I would particularly direct your attention.

1. That in trying our own personal religion, quiet suffering is a better test than angry zeal. The priests and Pharisees pretended to be guided by zeal for the glory of God. We have seen plainly that many of them were nothing more than hypocrites. But we cannot say this of them all. Many of them were not hypocrites but self-deceivers, who really thought that they were doing God a service in procuring the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their zeal was to them a proof of their sincerity, but they were sadly mistaken. Their zeal was odious in the sight of God, and led them to crucify the Lord of life and glory. In judging of ourselves, then, let us not take this standard. Let us not think that we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, or well pleasing in His sight, because we have a burning zeal against His real or supposed enemies. In a time like the present, when profanity and infidelity are rapidly increasing, it is very easy to deceive ourselves, and to imagine that it is simple love for Christ which kindles our indignation against the apparent progress of ungodliness: whereas it may be only self-interest, or party feeling, or unwillingness to be shaken in our received opinions. Yea, this zeal may deceive us, so as to cause us to persecute even Christ himself. When Sadduceism abounds it produces a re-action in the opposite direction, and the result is a blind and bigoted Pharisaism. Thus it was, when our Lord was crucified, Sadduceism prevailed to an alarming extent. The Pharisees therefore could see nothing but Sadduceism in any doctrine that differed from their own; and when Christ appeared, and attacked the traditions of men, many looked upon Him as a Sadducee, and when they saw His influence over the people, and His miracles, as the most dangerous of Sadducees, they therefore willingly joined in the project of His crucifixion, begun by artful and interested men for their own purposes. This should teach us that angry zeal is not a sufficient test of personal religion. Christ exhibited none of it, in the great hour of His sufferings. Patient endurance of wrongs and injustice was the characteristic of the last great trial. In this feature, then, of resemblance to Christ, let us seek it; and if we have it not, let us ask of Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not.

[2.] Let us learn, secondly, that in removing evil from the church, faith and prayer are much safer means than an appeal to civil power.

Had the Chief-priests and Pharisees betaken themselves to earnest and persevering prayer to God, when they first apprehended evil from Christ's preaching, they would have been preserved from the sin of rejecting their Messiah. God would in His mercy have shewn them their own hypocrisy and self-deceit. But, instead of praying to God, they applied to the Roman power, and by the Roman power their church and nation were destroyed. The folly of the Pharisees is far exceeded in our Christian times by the madness of those who think that the legislature can reform the church. The Pharisees only applied to Pilate to destroy an enemy. They did not think of petitioning him to reform their doctrines,

liturgy, and discipline. Were the legislature entirely composed of members of the church of England, I should consider such an attempt as dangerous and sinful. But when I am told that it is composed of men of every denomination and no denomination, I can regard it as little short of insanity. Were the legislature composed of none but men of God, I could not look for God's blessing; nor do I believe that they could, in the slightest degree, impart to the church the Spirit of life, and without this there can be no reformation. Faithful prayer, and faithful preaching of God's word, are God's appointed means for the edification of His church. If these do not succeed nothing else will. And if they be faithfully used they must succeed; and nothing else will be necessary. If it be replied, that these are not forgotten, but most diligently employed, I must confess that as to one of these means I have great doubt; I mean prayer—public, united, earnest, persevering prayer. I have not heard that all or any of the churches of this kingdom are every morning and evening crowded with those who desire God's blessing upon the church and nation; and that for this the hours of business or amusement are abridged. Until this be the case, I must assert that the right means for obtaining the Spirit of life are not used; and that every attempt made to model or reform the church by legislative enactment, will not only fail, but add to the confusion and disorders which prevail. It is God who hath said, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." If we would see the prosperity of the church, we must pray to God, and not petition men. We must be imbued with the spirit of Jeremiah, when he said, "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed: and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of living waters. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise."

[3.] Lastly, we are taught by the history just considered, the true nature of our relation and duty to the powers that be.

The conduct of our blessed Lord towards Pilate teaches us a lesson very seasonable in these perilous times, when men are not afraid to despise dominion, and to speak evil of dignities. It clearly shews us that we are not to judge, but to obey, those who have the rule over us, whosoever or whatsoever they may be: and not only to obey, but to yield them all becoming honour and respect. The spirit of the times always more or less affects the church, and hence it is that some Christian men are beguiled into the opinion, that by publicly reprovng and advertising the sins of our rulers, they are performing an act of Christian fidelity, and imitating the heroic boldness of the martyrs and confessors: whereas there is not anything more contrary to the Spirit of Christ and Christianity. In the Gospels there is not the slightest intimation that our Lord took any notice of the wickedness and oppressions of the Roman governors. Nor, when Pilate's conduct is described by the sacred historian, is there a single term of reproach. If the Epistles were the only remaining evidence against the characters of the Roman emperors, they would be free from much odium cast on their memories by the heathen historians of their crimes. When Felix sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, until Felix trembled. But we do not read anywhere else, that the sins of the rulers formed any part of St. Paul's gospel. Let us then beware of being misled by the licentiousness of the age. Let us guard our tongues and our pens from bringing any railing accusations against those whom it is our bounden duty to reverence and honour, whatever be their private characters. Let us, by the help of God, render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; and honour to whom honour. We shall be the more like our Lord and Saviour, and shall honour his name more, and promote His cause better, than by provoking those in power to class believers in Christ with the factious and rebellious talkers of the day. May the Lord in His mercy give us all grace to tread in His most Holy steps; and to Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever. Amen.